

UGA'S RETURN TO GLORY



Mark Bradley
My Opinion

We need to emphasize: Georgia hasn't yet won the national championship. It just feels that way. It has been 35 years since the Bulldogs headed toward January knowing a title was theirs for the winning. This Georgia team will rise on New Year's Day to play in a College Football Playoff semifinal, either in New Orleans or in Pasadena, Calif. Win on Jan. 1, and the Bulldogs will be back in Mercedes-Benz Stadium on Jan. 8,

ROAD TO ATLANTA
The College Football Playoff selection committee will announce the four playoff teams at about 12:30 p.m. today on ESPN. The championship game will be Jan. 8 at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. another championship on the line, a championship bigger than the one they seized here Saturday. Georgia fans have long wondered

when their turn would again come. They'd seen SEC brethren Alabama, Auburn, Florida, LSU and Tennessee take national titles since the Bulldogs beat Notre Dame on Jan. 1, 1981. They saw coach Mark Richt work 15 years, twice winning the SEC championship but never playing for a national title. In Year 2, Richt's replacement has knocked the lid off this program.

UGA continued on A7

EXPANDED COVERAGE
» Fans fill downtown Atlanta to see Georgia win the SEC Championship, **A6, C7**
» Schultz column: Thank defense, Smart for title, **C4**
» D'Andre Swift caps rout with a 64-yard TD run, **C5**
» Roquan Smith wins SEC Championship MVP, **C6**

SAVINGS | \$384 IN COUPONS | \$13,695 THIS YEAR

NATION, A4
SENATE TAX PLAN DOES NOT TARGET DELTA RIVALS

PERSONAL JOURNEYS, E1
LEARNING THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG ROAD



METRO, B1
TRUTH TESTING
Race for Atlanta mayor: Fact vs. fabrication

GREAT CHRISTMAS GIFTS
What they really want
ROCKY MOUNTAIN
SKI & BOARD
ESTABLISHED IN 1972
See ad on the Front Page of Metro

PATCHY FOG, WARM
High: 70
Low: 49
0% chance of rain

Monday: Cloudy, 67 / 50
Tuesday: Rain, 67 / 54
Wednesday: Rain, 51 / 46
Details on the back of **Metro**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

Price may be higher outside metro Atlanta | \$3.00

OVERPRESCRIBED AN AJC NATIONAL INVESTIGATION

Healers or dealers?

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD WATKINS | KEY AT MYAJC.COM

Years into the opioid crisis, the nation still struggles to rein in doctors.

By Carrie Teegardin
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After Dr. Hasan Babaturk was fired from a medical practice for his erratic behavior, he took his prescription pad and came up with a new business model. He met patients in parking lots, shopping malls and motels, where they paid him \$250 to \$350 in cash. Babaturk then gave them what they wanted: prescriptions for high doses of oxycodone. "It's easy money," the doctor said, explaining his mobile medical practice to the Maryland medical board.

In Georgia, prosecutors say Dr. George Mack Bird pre-signed prescriptions that his employees filled out and stocked his office with hydrocodone and other drugs for one-stop service. He stuffed proceeds — nearly \$1 million in cash

— in boxes and bags in his medical offices, home and vehicle.

Dr. Naga Raja Thota, a California pain management specialist, gave out hundreds of pain pills in exchange for sex. Dr. Henri Wetsehaar, a 93-year-old World War II veteran who made house calls, prescribed potentially deadly combinations of opioids, Xanax and muscle relaxants to Nevada patients who had no medical need for the pills. Dr. Howard Gregg Diamond doled out hydrocodone, as well as fentanyl, even as patients kept dying of overdoses, prosecutors allege.

His Texas staff told one patient not to worry about obtaining prescriptions. "Legal drug dealing is easy," the patient was told, according to testimony.

Drug enforcement agents trying to halt the opioid epidemic are overwhelmed by cartels that smuggle

Coming Thursday
» Doctors sound alarm.
» One family's nightmare.

Next Sunday
» Georgia's crisis.

MORE INSIDE

A family's story of love and loss

Mick Shannon was a handsome, athletic young man from a Hall County family. He was on track to do anything he wanted in life until he was prescribed pain pills after surgery. **A20**

Opioids continued on A18

ATLANTA'S MAYORAL ELECTION

Metro Atlanta's LGBT voters showing clout

By Greg Bluestein
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Cathy Woolard's forum was so packed that some of the voters who hoped she would be Atlanta's first openly gay mayor were turned away. Inside, a rapt audience erupted into laughter when she interrupted a long-winded answer about the Atlanta electorate to note one group that can't be overlooked.

"Gay people," she said, "are really different."

Metro Atlanta's LGBT voters have long been a force in local politics, but the gay community is marshaling its growing political clout in new ways ahead of Tuesday's runoffs to decide Atlanta's next mayor and other big-ticket contests.

LGBT continued on A7

A LETTER FROM THE AJC

Empty Stocking Fund donations cheer children

One of Atlanta's most treasured holiday traditions is the Empty Stocking Fund. For the past 90 years, readers of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution have generously donated money to ensure that underprivileged children living in our community experience the joy of opening a Christmas gift.

With your donations, the Empty Stocking Fund purchases age- and gender-appropriate gifts and invites qualified parents and guardians of children to visit Santa's Village and select gifts for their children.

For many children, this is the only gift they will receive.

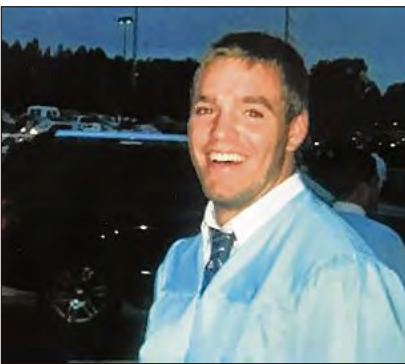
We invite you to participate again this year. It's a very direct and meaningful way to take action to make a positive difference for one of metro Atlanta's 50,000 children who receive gifts from the Empty Stocking Fund.

Inside most editions of today's newspaper, you'll find an envelope that makes it easy for you to make a contribution. You may also donate online at emptystockingfund.org.

Thank you for supporting this important Atlanta tradition. Happy Holidays.



54 Number of opioid doses legally prescribed for every adult and child in Georgia in a recent 12-month period.	146 Doctors the AJC identified who were charged, convicted or sentenced for federal offenses involving opioids over 18 months.	1,000+ Doctors nationwide facing medical board actions regarding opioid prescribing violations in a recent 18-month period. JAN. 1, 2016-JUNE 30, 2017
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SPORTS, C13
Getting offense back on track
Not panicking and sticking to the plan gives Falcons a three-game win streak.

Business Classifieds D1 H1 Obituaries B4 Puzzles E15

Volume 69, Number 337

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1.99 lb
WITH CARD

Fresh Perdue Boneless Chicken Breasts or Thighs

3/\$10
WITH CARD
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Select Varieties, 12-Pack, 12 fl oz Cans or 8-Pack, 12 fl oz Bottles
When you buy 3 or more in the same transaction with Card. Quantities less than 3 priced at \$4.99 each.

88¢ ea
WITH CARD

Hass Avocados Medium or Mangos